



United States Department of State
Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations

Local Dispute Resolution as a Tool to Prevent Violence against Civilians



In conflict and post-conflict settings, every day disputes at the local level can flare into wider violence and jeopardize forward momentum on national peace and stability. The U.S. Department of State supports the efforts of influential local leaders through programs that train key actors in dispute resolution so that they may resolve sub-national disputes before they escalate to the national level or facilitate dispute resolution and dialogue efforts of local leaders to address sub-national grievances and concerns before they result in outbreaks of violence.

SUB-NATIONAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION EXAMPLES

Connecting local leaders trained in dispute resolution techniques:

In Iraq, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor funded Mercy Corps from January 2009 to December 2010 to train 87 Iraqi leaders – Sunni and Shia, Arab and Kurd, tribal elders, religious leaders, government officials, politicians, and civil society – in dispute resolution techniques. The program provided training in dispute resolution, intensive mentoring and coaching, and support for the direct application of new negotiation and mediation skills. These leaders have worked to resolve almost 130 major disputes; including tribal conflicts over land, tensions between citizens and government over services, disputes over elections, and clashes between rival factions of the Iraqi army and police. This program created a network of leaders that have been able to reach agreements on these disputes that otherwise go unsolved. Network members can point to clear examples of where their interventions have led to a measurable reduction in violent incidents.

Resolving disputes with security forces:

In Pakistan from 2009 to 2013, United States Institute for Peace (USIP) trained 95 journalists, teachers, activists, religious scholars, business people, and local government officials in dispute resolution techniques. This program provided five capacity building workshops that taught conflict analysis, communication skills, dialogue skills and process, negotiation, mediation, and electoral violence-prevention skills. Group successes have been compiled and made available to all participants, encouraging them to take on a wide range of peacebuilding efforts as conflicts arise. One facilitator successfully mediated

a dispute that pitted the Pakistani Army against villagers and convened government and Army officials, community leaders, and shop owners over issues stemming from the demolition of a market. Another facilitator brought together 16 groups delivering relief and rehabilitation to areas devastated by flooding, and negotiated with security forces for more help and better access to the area.

Facilitating dialogue to prevent violence against civilians around elections:

In Haiti from 2010 to 2012, USIP and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) trained 66 Haitian local leaders in dispute resolution techniques. More than 40 Haitian local leaders acquired new techniques to prevent and resolve conflict in their communities through conflict mitigation training. USIP and NDI trained another 26 Haitian local leaders to resolve political disputes. Participants applied their skills successfully to local conflicts, including preventing community-level electoral violence in the 2010-2011 national elections. For example, one participant organized a dialogue event with member of the clergy, judicial officials, political party chiefs and representatives, civil society representatives, representatives from the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), members of the police, and 10 journalists about violence against civilians in the electoral period. The community had a reputation as a "hot spot," but little to no violence broke out in this community when demonstrations turned violent elsewhere in Haiti.

Implementing national level peace processes sub-national level:

In Kenya's Rift Valley, the United Kingdom's Department of International Development (DFID) funded Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) to convene 80 elders in Nakuru County to negotiate a sub-national peace process. HD supported the implementation of the national peace process at the sub-national level in 2011 by identifying and bringing together 40 Agikuyu elders and 40 Kalenjin elders. The elders met separately to identify concerns before coming together to discuss grievances; including ongoing land disputes, militia activity in the local area, and the uneven resettlement of internally displaced persons. The elders met with local administrators and went out together in the region to socialize the peace process. HD assisted with developing, amending, and revising a draft peace agreement before the elders discussed it with various community groups. The elders established stronger links with each other and with local administrators, and successfully intervened in a dispute between the Maasai and the Agikuyu, which resulted in a 90 percent decrease in cattle-rustling. The elders finalized the agreement and publicized it widely in Nakuru County before a formal signing ceremony.

Pairing sub-national peace processes with nationwide local dialogue efforts:

In Ukraine in 2014, the DFID again used Humanitarian Dialogue to convene Government of Ukraine officials and local leaders in Donetsk and Luhansk to facilitate a sub-national peace process and train civil society actors in eastern and southern Ukraine in dispute resolution techniques. HD met local leaders in Donetsk and Luhansk to discuss the humanitarian situation, resulting in a Declaration on the Protection of Civilians, signed by the Donetsk People's Republic, the Luhansk People's Republic, and battalions aligned with Kyiv. HD established a network of civil society actors in eastern and southern Ukraine to defuse tensions and prevent further polarization, by providing training to the network and enabling them to analyze the tensions in their regions. HD also provided the network with support to develop community dialogue processes to defuse tensions across Ukraine. Civil society actors facilitated 111 dialogue activities in all 12 regions to address tensions such as those between pro-Maidan and anti-Maidan groups, internally displaced people and host communities, and citizens and local government.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

**If you have specific questions, please contact CSO's Atrocities Prevention team:
Annie Bird, BirdAR@state.gov, Natasha Greenberg, GreenbergNT@state.gov,
or David Phillips, PhillipsDM2@state.gov**